

1464
A
S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

INCORPORATED SOCIETY

FOR THE

PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL IN
FOREIGN PARTS;

AT THEIR

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MARY-LE-BOW,

ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 1794.

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND

WILLIAM LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER.

OXFORD:

SOLD BY FLETCHER AND HANWELL;

BY P. AND C. RIVINGTON, LONDON; AND T. BROSTER, CHESTER.

M DCC XCVI.

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*At the Anniversary Meeting of the Society for the
Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, in
the Vestry-Room of St. Mary-le-Bow, on Friday
the 21st Day of February, 1794;*

AGREED, that the Thanks of the SOCIETY
be given to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop
of *Chester*, for the Sermon preached by his Lord-
ship this day before the SOCIETY; and that his
Lordship be desired to deliver a copy of the same
to the SOCIETY to be printed.

WILLIAM MORICE, *Secretary.*

MARK xvi. verse 15.

AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD,
AND PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE.

ARGUMENTS tending to prove that our Religion shall one day be universal, are supplied by such a variety of Topics, that the present partial extension of it has sometimes to those, who do not cavil at it's positive evidences, afforded matter of scruple and difficulty. The dignity of it's Author, it's essential characters, it's doctrines, it's precepts, it's positive institutions, it's advantages in a temporal view, it's sanctions, which are eternal, are all Topics of this kind. Add to these, it's direct claims to Universality foretold by the Prophets, confirmed by our Saviour, and repeated by his Apostles, in the commission to whom it was expressly provided for: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel unto every
B 2 "creature."

“ creature.” Nay the history of this Religion, the treatment of the Messiah by those, who upon the supposition of it's being a local and partial dispensation could alone expect to be benefited by it; the extraordinary difficulties, under which it was first propagated, the miseries cheerfully undergone in support of it, not eventually, as matters unforeseen and unexpected, but with a clear foresight of the distresses and sufferings, which were foretold as the distinguishing marks of those, who should, in obedience to our Lord, undertake the execution of this charge, are all Topics, which have more or less a tendency to render the universal propagation of it, at one time or other, necessary to fulfil the measure of the Divine mercy to be exhibited in the Redemption of Man by Christ; and, perhaps, to vindicate the importance and value of the means hitherto employed.

Yet eighteen Centuries are now nearly elapsed, and not above one sixth part, it may be, of Mankind profess this Religion, or know more of it than by report; nor do there appear any strong or obvious signs indicating an extraordinary progress on this part approaching.

Indeed, as to the objection of the Deist
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against the Gospel, that if it contain a Religion from God, it would necessarily, in force of it's Divine perfection and fitness, make it's own way, and, approving itself to universal conviction, become, as it were at once, the Religion of the World, the supposition agrees with the existing state of no one Religion whatever ; and therefore needs no answer ; because the conclusion would be, that no Religion is true : and that God has vouchsafed to none, what the advocates of each might presume from this supposition to consider as necessary ; for the same conclusion would hold with regard to every real or supposeable mode of natural Religion, as well as of revealed. So that, upon the ground of this objection, no Religion of any kind or sort could be true.

With regard to those, who allowing the truth of Christianity, are yet offended, that it hath not obtained more universally ; their difficulties connect at no great distance with the question, “ Why all men are not blessed “ with equal advantages ? ” as that question does with another ; “ Why all men were not “ made as happy as possible at once ; and “ that too, from the moment that happiness “ was possible ? ” In a word, “ Why God

“ did not create Man other than he did, and
 “ from all eternity ?”

It is easy to see, that questions of this kind can be of no other use, than to shew our incapacity to judge of the Divine conduct farther than Revelation shall enable us.

Indeed the best means to restrain the wild and presumptuous fancies of man respecting what it is fitting God should have done, or probable that he shall do in future, is to recur to the history, and to that in the first place, which Revelation gives us, of what God certainly has done.

From thence it may be supposed, we shall learn, what station is assigned to us ; what means are put into our power ; what encouragements are offered, and what obligations we are under to co-operate with God in giving extension to a clearer knowledge of the Divine œconomy, as well as of the gracious scheme of Man's Redemption.

From what small commencements it pleased God to give existence to his moral government upon this our globe, is observable in the creation of our first Parents. Yet the permanency of this System so apparently simple, and that uniform knowledge of duty, which in a state of continued innocence
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would of course have obtained universally, was found to be precarious, and by the early abuse of that free choice of action, which is the only subject of moral government, was soon destroyed.

The Penalties of the first Law remained now only to be executed upon the authors of disobedience, and in it's consequences upon their posterity, when it pleased God to spare the Offenders; and to hold out to their hopes another covenant to be obtained by the seed of the Woman, who had thus been tempted to forfeit her first estate of happiness and virtue.

In the joy and exultation of these good Tidings did the anxious Mother expect the immediate completion of this blessing in the birth of her first child? A few years only elapsed before the hands of this first-born stained in the blood of his Brother, manifested by a signal example the force of that derangement in the moral world, to which her own crime had given origin. Nay, so totally alienated from the obedience of moral restrictions was the mind of Man, so little influence had either the fears of punishment, or the hopes of mercy, that in the ninth Generation from Adam, Noah in vain preached to a wicked world the certainty of their de-

struction: and they unmoved could see the righteous Patriarch preparing under Divine Revelation to save himself and family from an universal Deluge.

What seems full as extraordinary, is, that even so tremendous a Visitation of sin had not all the effect to be expected upon the few, who were the selected examples of Divine Mercy. A Son of the Patriarch's thus saved in a few years drew upon himself too justly the curse of an offended Parent. And with so rapid a bias did the progress of immorality gain upon mankind, that in nine generations from the Flood, God saw it expedient again to separate an Individual from the rest of the world by a special covenant, that in his family might be preserved as well a true sense of Religion, as a faith in the expectation of the great Promise made of a Redeemer. The posterity of Abraham, to render this separation permanent, were then carried into Egypt, where these Sons of Shem in a few years found themselves in bondage to the children of Ham; and to avoid an utter extirpation were removed by the miraculous interposition of Heaven: and were again encouraged to hope for the possession of the land promised to Abraham. Yet neither had a series of miracles so wonderful,

derful, nor the promises of a Land so desirable, much effect in alienating their minds from the vices of the very people, whose oppression they hated and feared.

Still to secure in any degree the purity of their worship, and to create a reliance upon the true God, another measure was adopted, to which, as to all the foregoing, the presumption of human wisdom would, without suspicion of failure, have insured the fullest and most perfect success.

During the course of the journey from Egypt, God himself condescended to be the local King of a distinct nation, gave a civil and religious polity to three millions of people assembled to express their acceptance of it, under the sanction of every temporal enjoyment to be annexed to their obedience, and that of the most awful of worldly punishments upon their disobedience. Yet before this very Law could be formally delivered to them, they had set up another God by universal consent, and the whole body in a few years, as we learn from the history, as well as the testimony of an Apostle, perished through unbelief.

The conduct of their descendants, under the subsequent administration of this Law, was what might be expected from such a commence-

commencement, and affords a striking proof of the inefficacy of temporal blessings and of temporal punishments upon the public mind, where a sense of Religion is wanting.

If when finally subjugated to a foreign power they looked up with an eager desire to the promise of a Messiah, they had by an irreligious perversion of ideas, and a carnal interpretation of their Prophets, so degraded the dignity of his function, and the importance of the blessings to be procured by him, that they rejected his actual mission, because his kingdom was not of a temporal nature ; and in the humble Jesus crucified him, whose object it was to give to the World a pure Religion, and to restore in Man a perfect obedience to God's moral government. So little apparent success attended the fulfilment of that great promise, which had engaged the expectations and kept alive the faith of all good men for the space of four thousand years, even where the means adopted, as well as the end proposed, were of Divine appointment. And if events, which seemed at first view to frustrate the proposed plan, were so disposed by Divine wisdom as to become each in their turn necessary, and indeed essential to it's completion, it's progress was still gradual.

Twelve Fishermen, whose Religion had led them to expect a Messiah, and whose constant attendance upon Christ during his ministry on earth rendered them peculiarly acquainted with the real dignity and design of his mission, were by him commanded to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature."

The reception which these met with was not unnatural from that depravity of human nature, which it was the purpose of their labours to correct and remedy. They were every where ill treated, by the Jew first, and afterwards by the Gentile; were scourged, imprisoned, tortured, and in the end put to death. Persecution even of the Converts to Christianity followed upon persecution, whilst the charges alledged against them were chiefly mutual benevolence, piety towards God, and a peculiar abstinence from the vices of the world.

Thus did three Centuries pass, bearing witness to the sufferings and fortitude of Christians, before the Religion of the Gospel obtained the security of an establishment; and even then, however surprising the degree of success so obtained may justly seem, when the means employed be compared with the difficulties opposed to them, yet the extent
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of this Religion, considered with that of the habitable world, was still small.

The establishment itself however, under the protection and favour of the Roman empire, was a fair pledge of that prosperity, which had been foretold by our Lord under the parable of "the least of all seeds;" when "the birds of the air should lodge in the "branches thereof."

And now that the Religion of the Gospel was in possession of a Government, which itself had aimed at universal empire, it had hardly been unnatural, if the disciple of Christ, in the eagerness of his zeal, had asked, Wilt thou not at this time, Lord, take all the Heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession?

Here again the course of events took a direction very wide of the expectations which human wisdom might have formed to itself.

The Church, which had hitherto been protected and fostered by the miraculous interposition of Heaven during it's infancy, was left to attain to maturity under the ordinary assistances of Divine Providence, bestowed upon the use of human means. Heresies, from which the Church, even in the time of the Apostles, was not exempt, were
now

now suffered to impede the progress of the true faith ; and that Learning, which, upon the cessation of miraculous aids, was become necessary to the support and illustration of the Gospel, soon gave place to ages of ignorance and intellectual darkness.

With God a thousand years are but as a day : but in human estimation it would be considered as a long day, ere Literature revived in Europe, and the truths of the Gospel resumed the splendour of their primitive purity.

So little indeed did the conduct of the Divine œconomy in these several dispensations follow the tract, which human wisdom would have directed ; so often has it counteracted the measures, which mankind would have considered as the probable, if not the necessary means of completing the scheme of God's Mercy, in perfecting the moral obedience of his creatures, that the original design, as it lay unfolded in the councils of the Deity, was hardly more out of the reach of man's invention, than were the various means and gradual progress, by which this scheme has been promoted and propagated beyond his sagacity and apprehension of what was probable and expedient.

Indeed it has happened, from a variety of
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misapprehensions, that since the date of the Gospel-publication men have always been disposed to look forward to the speedy consummation of a scheme, which promises to extend the actual knowledge of the true Religion, or at least to afford the means of this knowledge to the whole race of mankind; yet whoever will look back upon the commencement of this scheme coeval with Creation, will be induced to think, as well from the partial extent, which it has obtained during a space of near six thousand years, as from the apparent purport of Prophecies yet unfulfilled, that ages to come may wait for the full completion of it, upon the supposition even, that it connect with no other moral system, which it seems not improbable it may do.

But the period when the complete extent of this scheme shall take place, be it more or less remote, would, if known, hardly afford any new motive affecting our endeavours to promote that end, however an assurance of it's nearer approach might operate upon our exertions by adding strength to our faith and animation to our hopes.

Neither can any conclusion affecting our practice be drawn from the success of our endeavours beyond what may respect the
prudence

prudence and propriety of the means employed.

We have seen measures originating with the Deity, and executed under the Divine direction, for the advancement of moral and religious purity, frequently fail of what, humanly speaking, seemed to be the probable as well as the desired effect. Yet the Divine Councils are not frustrated; and the pious exercise of our duty can never fail of the ends, which God purposes to serve by our instrumentality, however precarious may be the immediate objects of human hope.

If therefore in the variety of these laudable institutions, all of which, we must suppose, were originally set on foot from pure and commendable motives, they have been attended with different degrees of success at different times in different countries, the same pure motives will derive upon all, who have encouraged them, the same reward from him, who condescends to look down with a watchful and affectionate care over the cultivation and extension of his spiritual Vineyard.

Not that I would be understood to apologize for the want of success in the exertions of this Society. Nor do I think, that our reports, compared with the general issue of
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all measures contrived to advance Man's spiritual improvement, render an apology needful. On the contrary, to expect a more rapid success is to presume upon our own speculations respecting God's future councils, or to forget what the sacred history, in every page of the Divine dispensations, tells us, of that constant, that rooted aversion in Man to spiritual habits, as well as of his propensity to evil, which, however wonderful in itself, would be more familiar to us, if we more attended to the various dispensations of God's moral government contrived to correct and remedy the corruption of our nature.

The Conversion of Profelytes, to be effected by Missionaries, who have not the aid of miraculous powers, must always, in the nature of things, be slow and gradual. The passions of the untamed Indian will trample under foot the pearl, which he cannot estimate. But, if experience has taught us, that a degree of civilization, and some knowledge of the benefits derived from it, are requisite to render Religion an object of consideration, late reports bring no unpromising accounts, that the Indians most contiguous to our Western Settlements may, from very necessity, apply themselves to the arts of cultivation; in which case it cannot be doubted,
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but that our Missionaries may find an easy access to the religious improvement of their minds. And it should seem, that the religious rites of various portions of that Continent are so far from discouraging attempts to propagate Christianity, that their origin, with some plausibility at least, is traced up to those of the Mosaic dispensation.

The appointment moreover of a Bishop in Canada, the established residence of a Lieutenant-Governor in the upper Province, as well as the personal character of those thus selected, are all circumstances which cannot but be favourable to the designs of this Society.

In the mean time, the effects of this institution in promoting pure religion amongst the posterity of the earlier settlers in North America, to whom a detached situation, and the want of a Ministry, had left little or no means of social worship; and who, from defect of instruction, could retain nothing but the name of a Religion, of which the doctrines and precepts no longer administered either direction or comfort, have been, from its very commencement, and continue to be, such as at once will justify the wisdom of the measures adopted, as well as fulfil every

every reasonable expectation. Indeed the American colonies, whilst they made a part of the British empire, seem to have derived the benefits of true Religion from this institution more than from any, or perhaps from every other cause.

If we turn our eyes Eastward, it may possibly be urged, that less progress has there been made in the propagation of Christianity; but it should be considered, how small the sphere of action has there been hitherto; and how few the opportunities offered: that our commerce, though successful, has not in proportion extended the intercourse with the natives; and that our territorial acquisitions are comparatively but of late date: that the recent establishment, and increase of the English interests, promise to open “a great door and an effectual” to the introduction of the Gospel. For however the Hindoo, from the peculiar habits and policy of his country, may be indisposed to listen to any proposition offering a change of opinion, especially as it respects a Religion, the supposed antiquity of which is considered by him as an irrefragable argument of it's truth: yet so much does his Religion connect with the theology of the Gospel, that, however disguised by fable, it cannot

cannot but afford a facility of success to the Christian Teacher, wherever the means of a familiar intercourse shall be obtainable.

But the Mahometan has adopted so much of the doctrines, of the precepts, and of the evidences of the Gospel, in support of the Coran, whilst with the Jew he acknowledges the Law and the Prophets, and allows the truth of Christ's divine Mission, that it is difficult not to presume, as many pious and learned men have done, upon the probable extension of our Religion through the vast tract of Asia, now subjected to the idolatrous worship of this false Prophet.

Much however of the success of every attempt to effect this, must depend upon the conduct and general character of those, who profess to be Christians; as much of their character and conduct will depend upon the establishment which the Civil power shall there maintain for the due performance and exercise of their own religious service. The Society might indeed hope for great benefits more directly to be derived upon this institution, if stipends, similar to those granted by the British Legislature to our Missionaries in America, were likewise given to a Chaplain at each Fort and Presidency, expressly for the duties of a Missionary: by which means

he would possess a degree of weight and influence, which no Missionary, simply as such, can be supposed to have.

In Africa the settlement lately established, and our increasing knowledge of the country, hitherto unexplored, give room to suppose, that we may even there take an advantageous station in the important work of diffusing religious information. What cannot but be considered as favourable to our views, wherever it occur, is the similarity, which the religious rites, in some of the interior parts of this Continent, have with the institutions and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law; the clear vestiges of which, however mutilated and varied, and by whatever means preserved in regions so distant from each other, may be considered as a foundation providentially laid for the easier reception of the evidences of Christianity.

With regard to our commerce upon the coast of Guinea, the subject so directly occupies the attention of the Legislature, that I industriously avoid any remark which does not lead to my present purpose.

The Injustice and Inhumanity too often attending the traffic in Slaves are topics, which will no doubt have their influence. Arguments likewise, drawn from considerations of
present

present interest, have probably contributed to reconcile some to the abandonment of a lucrative trade. In the mean time wise and salutary regulations have and will continue to meliorate the condition of these unhappy captives, both on the voyage and in the subsequent circumstances of life. But in the end it seems too likely, that whatever may be the decision of the Legislature here, we must wait, for a general abolition of the evil, till more effectual means, than a penal and partial prohibition upon the Purchaser, be contrived by the propagation of a Religion, which shall write in the hearts of the Venders also that Divine precept, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

There is a remark upon our general subject, which if it appear obvious, at least does not seem in fact to fall enough under ordinary observation; it is, that the propagation of the Gospel, and it's progress towards Universality, is committed solely to the care and exertions of human piety, under the providential aids of Divine Superintendence.

Neither the language of our Lord, nor the practice of his disciples, point at all to any intervention to be used apart from human means in the contrivance and execution of this great work.

In the first ages it was committed to human
man

man zeal and industry, with the assistances of miraculous powers, so long as it seemed requisite to give it that extraordinary support.

After these aids were withdrawn, still the precepts "When thou art converted, strengthen thy Brethren; Go, teach all Nations," were considered as binding the Ministry to promote at home, and to propagate abroad the knowledge of the Gospel.

In what sudden degree, or with what rapid successes, our industry may in future be rewarded, God only knows. Still human industry must employ the means, to which alone it can be expected that God should attach an increase, as to that co-operation on our part to which our Lord's final charge promises the continuance of the divine blessing, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

Should considerations drawn from the apparent difficulties of this work, or from the great proportion of it yet to be completed, suggest the question, Who is sufficient for these things? we answer, God alone, it is most true; but it is God through the instrumentality of human means: it is God, who shall supply, from the sources of infinite wisdom and infinite power, that efficacy, which in human means alone considered may not always be apparent.

I press

I press this topic in order to shew more strongly another kind of necessity which there is for human exertions in this point; a necessity which regards ourselves, and which renders human exertions no farther matters of choice, than are all matters of strict duty. In this view, to use the words of the Apostle, the Gospel is "committed" to us all. And a variety of considerations will serve to convince every good Christian, that his obligations to extend it's benefits will follow upon his ability to do it.

If a system so important to mankind be founded in truth, or the probable appearance of truth, there will arise from this single consideration an obligation to communicate it. But in proportion as this System be beneficial to the interests of mankind, present and future, Christian benevolence will oblige us: Lastly, if to do good to others be the great law of the Gospel, binding all universally, the compliance of all in communicating the greatest possible good becomes a direct test of our obedience.

As to the means; those hitherto adopted and pursued by this Society seem to have been so deliberately made choice of, and so wisely varied, that nothing apparently retards their greater success, but the narrow limits of our income, which it is hard to suppose will be long
a matter

a matter of regret in a cause so consonant to our moral as well as religious sentiments.

No great object seems to fail of obtaining the voluntary munificence of the public. Great efforts of this kind have lately been made in promoting a better sense of Religion at home by the more general education of the poor; efforts which, I trust, I shall ascribe to their leading and principal cause, if I attribute them, not to the characteristic liberality of the English Nation, nor to a mere moral sentiment of benevolence, but to the pure and sublime motives enforced by the Gospel.

Temporary and local Charities will occasionally occupy and engross the exertions even of good men: but whilst the benefits derived to this Kingdom through our Religion, as well as the horrors following from the total renunciation of it by those who now give law to a great nation on the continent, tend daily to impress on the public mind its value and importance, we have good reason to hope, that a more general attention to the object of this Society will enable us to prosecute, on a more extended plan, our humble, yet not ineffectual, endeavours to render this Religion universal.

THE END.

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